

# EXPLORING “ELSEWHERELAND”: PLACES DESIRED, REMEMBERED AND DWELLED

Place experience of vacationers on Saaremaa Island, Estonia

[Received January 1st 2022; accepted August 11th 2022 – DOI: 10.21463/shima.170]

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines summer vacationers’ experiences and connections with an island place on Saaremaa in Estonia. Discourse from sixteen in-depth interviews are coupled with a theoretical discussion exploring place, emotions, memory, and self through an analysis of personal narratives on individual emotional perspectives of meaningful places, memory of places elsewhere, and the materiality of the cultural landscape itself. Emotional aspects associated with verbal expressions are examined with a discussion of emergent themes of place experience via a literary narrative writing approach. The emotional dynamics of rhetorical conversation between interviewees, researcher, and place echoed through the shared materiality of people and their environment. Personal narratives of place meanings examine island environments through emotional individual experiences resulting in five themes: places desired, places remembered, lost and found, elsewhere and home, and returns. Home, everyday, and elsewhere are intertwined impressions of island places memorised, balanced via expressions of belonging as experiences of everyday and nostalgic renderings of times lost.

**KEYWORDS:** second home, elsewhere, everyday, memories, place experience

## Introduction

*We are moving in the territories of ‘imagined nostalgia’, where you learn to miss things you never had. (Löfgren, 1999, p. 148)*

Contemporary European society is fractured in a struggle between conflicts of identity. Renegotiations of past and present, integration and diversity are especially acute after the collapse of the Soviet empire and ongoing enlargement of the European Union at the turn

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<sup>1</sup> The first named author, born in Estonia and raised on Saaremaa during Soviet times, maintains property on Saaremaa. The article draws on a broader study of cultural memory and place identity (Raadik Cottrell, 2010).

of the new millennium. Identity and culture are elastic concepts, involving conscious and unconscious processes through which places are lived and made while giving meaning to the lives of the people involved. Communication of those meanings is essential to everyone in this process and to others beyond the actual lived place. The meaning attached to landscapes is negotiable due to competing social actors involved in a continuous interpretation and variability offered across cultural, historical, individual, and situational aspects (Raadik Cottrell & Cottrell, 2019, 2020).

Discussions of place and dwelling in late modern society (postmodern) are tightly connected with notions of mobility. Urry (2000) claims that every form of contemporary dwelling relates to some form of mobility. Yet, mobility does not necessarily suggest a lack of rootedness, or “existential outsidersness” (Relph, 1976). The very term ‘tourist’, an alien to the place lacking attachment and “insiderness” (Relph, 1976), in static oppositional categorical division from the local to the place, has been challenged (Müller, 2013). Reviewing notions of ‘heterotopia’ and power, many scholars discuss the fluidity in notions related to insiders versus outsiders (locals versus tourists) as agents determining how places are conceived, perceived, and lived (de Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1991; Elands & Lengkeek, 2012). Those relations are never stable; relationships rather than entities flowing in multiple directions and challenging mobility issues related to identity and home (Raadik Cottrell & Cottrell, 2020).

Saaremaa, an Estonian island in the Baltic Sea, is in a continual state of transformation. The island as a formerly closed soviet border zone is sensitive to large developmental projects and expected changes is expressed with concern among environmental groups, second homeowners, and tourists. Soviet past and its’ structures (i.e., missile sites – [Figure 1], memorials, prisons, and abandoned collective farms [Figure 2], to name a few) represent memory sites and difficult identities Estonia still struggles with (Raadik Cottrell, 2010).



Figure 1 - Former Soviet underground bunker on Saaremaa (Authors’ photos, 2010).



Figure 2 - Abandoned collective farm site on Saaremaa as military heritage (authors' photos, 2010).

The painful past has been turned into a successful business opportunity for some, yet continues to be a sensitive issue for many (Figure 2). Providing opportunities for high-quality tourist experiences is an important management objective for island environments, as it is at destinations where tourism is managed. Islands as desired vacation spots face increased pressure on accessibility and overall development (Raadik Cottrell, 2010, 2017). ‘An island where time rests’ is a promise given to visitors by the tourism board while crossing the strait between the mainland and Saare County, meanwhile idealised tranquil pastoral landscapes are changing and even considered as a “well-sold myth” (Kaur et al., 2004).

### Purpose

This paper focuses on visitor experience of an island place in Estonia while exploring the role of memory in both their constructions of place and interrelatedness between place, home and their personal identity. The purpose was to explore place experience in more depth to address some assumed connections between memory and perceived place identity through experienced landscapes of tourism. Through an analysis of personal narratives (Denzin, 1992), individual emotional readings of meaningful places, influences of memory of places elsewhere, and the very materiality of the cultural landscape in constructions of both place and individual identity are reflected on. Discussions about place identity and self are interlinked with spatial practices and anticipated changes of place, along with the changed meanings of place as discussed via a literary narrative approach as a form of storytelling by the researcher (Burlingame, 2019) who is a native Estonian and raised on Saaremaa. Rhetorical expressions of island place through verbal impressions of experiences are examined. Empirical data from in-depth interviews are intertwined with a theoretical discussion exploring place experience, emotions, memory, and self. Narratives of interviewees about the meaningfulness of the island environment through their experiences are analyzed from the biographical, spatial, and temporal aspects of emergent themes.

Narrative perspectives should not be regarded as isolated individual experiences of “fateful moments” (Giddens, 1991) or “epiphanies” (Denzin, 1992), but embedded in coherent and meaningful context, stretching over spatial and temporal dimensions (Larsen, 2007; Müller, 2013; Rosenthal, 1993). Narratives are inherently cultural, influenced by officially mediated narratives, as well as narratives of other people (Ricoeur, 1991). A “narrative

provides an important way to demonstrate need” (Young, 1997, p. 73) for understanding place experience.

### Theoretical perspectives of place, heterotopia, dwelling and mobility

de Certeau (1984) illustrates place as seen and experienced where everyday practices of pedestrians generate a text of anonymous laws counterpoising the conceptual space. This anthropological space, the lived landscape, carries the footsteps of tourists as well, *resisting* travelers together with locals walking the “Concept-city” of de Certeau (1984). Pedestrian patterns fill locations on the map with meanings through experience, thus locations become meaningful places (de Certeau, 1984). Attachment to place becomes related to the maintenance of walking this path. Places are weaved together through habitualised and ritualised passages of movement (Casey, 2001; Olwig, 2006). Taking de Certeau’s notion of a place as “filled emptiness,” attachment to a place should be understood “in terms of this epistemology of nothingness” (Olwig, 2006, p. 29). A place as holding place for something, “a void from which existence springs” (Olwig, 2006, p. 27), allows it to become part of the fabric of landscapes, equally expressing mobility as well as dwelling in the place.

Following Foucault’s (in Foucault & Miskowicz, 1986) notion of “heterotopia” (of emotional priority of “other place”), several researchers support the notion that second homes or regularly visited vacation spots become a place where someone may feel more *home* than in the everyday place of residence (Löfgren, 1999) (Figure 3).



Figure 3 – Holiday home,<sup>2</sup> Mustjala village (authors’ photos, 2010).

Linked to the search for the existential centre “out-there” (Elands & Lengkeek, 2012), holiday sites become places of continuity across the lifespan of an individual or even over generations (Cohen, 1986; Elands & Lengkeek, 2012; Müller, 2013; Relph, 1986). Places we travel to are extended activity spaces of everyday (Massey, 1995). Symptomatic to the intensified outreach of activity spaces is the increased number of second homes (Müller, 2013) with many used as guest houses as well (see Figure 4).

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<sup>2</sup> Kooli Kopli was previously a Soviet work camp where the lead author/researcher had worked in the summer as a youth. The site was transitioned to a holiday farm and second home by two Finns who live there as permanent residents.





Figure 4 - Second home site on Saaremaa in the countryside (authors' photo 2010).

Contemporary views on dwelling include the notions of mobility to meanings of home, thus expanding the existential insideness as described by Relph (1986), Cohen's (1979), and Elands & Lengkeek's (2013) multiple centres. It is possible to argue for the meaning of home in the movement itself, where meaningful centre is not bound to any specific locale (Deleuze & Guittari, 1987). The quest for belonging as a modern utopia becomes manageable through travel (Löfgren, 1999). Deconstruction of differences between modernist exile and postmodern tourism allows seeing tourism as desired and designed displacement (Kaplan, 1996). Thus, the meaning of home escapes from mere *here and now* to the collective with *there and then*, where movement between those places becomes an intrinsic part of the whole.

Even the most seemingly ordinary landscapes are densely populated by daydreams, images, and fantasies – “mindscapes of staggering proportions” (Löfgren, 1999, p. 2). The idea of places and landscapes in their “betweenness” (Casey, 2001), in constant stage of “doing” (Cresswell, 2002; de Certeau, 1985; Massey, 2001), applies to “vacationscapes” (Löfgren, 1999) as well: the constant framing of sceneries, mixing personal memories with collective images. Reflections layered on them enable and disable *escapescapes* we restlessly seek in our everyday lives. Persistently leaving and returning in and within our bodily existence, desired places are often elusive in this search, and “destinations reached disappoint, and send us searching again” (Game, 2001, p. 226). People seek belonging in time and space and linear time in this search for a fixed place and time of belonging with the end point of home constantly sought elsewhere.

The notion of “elsewhere” has been constructed through *otherness*; the vacation, the escape, the “bracketed everyday” (Elands & Lengkeek, 2012; Lefebvre, 1991; Löfgren, 1999), and is present in our everyday lives. As Löfgren (1999) argues, in this desire to “get away from it all” our everyday tensions become more visible, and quite paradoxically, the vacations become one of the few manageable utopias. Yet, Löfgren (1999) reminds us about a melancholy of losing this utopia already in the beginning of our vacation, while indulging our minds in the nostalgia of *paradise lost*. But what we cannot forget is “the magic of bodily movement on the road to elsewhere” (Löfgren, 1999, p. 281).

## Methods

*“Every story is a travel story.”* (de Certeau, 1984, p. 115)

As a qualitative study, empirical data of interest for a narrative literary analysis (Burlingame, 2019; Denzin, 1992) came from 16 in-depth interviews. The interviewees (names changed for anonymity) were selected from respondents who participated in a visitor survey (Raadik Cottrell, 2010) July to August 2007, exploring place experience among Saare County<sup>3</sup> visitors and second homeowners (Figure 5). Interviewees were primarily approached while on a ferry connecting the islands to the mainland, serving as a main access point to Saare County.



Figure 5 - Saaremaa Island, Saare County, Estonia (shaded grey). Adapted from Raadik Cottrell & Cottrell, 2020.

Interviewees consisted of five couples, twelve second homeowners,<sup>4</sup> and seven women, all married aged 39 to 65. Five had Estonian roots (three permanent residents of Estonia) while the others represented Belgium, Canada, Finland, Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands. The couple from Germany, Gertrud<sup>5</sup> and Manfred, were traveling in their recreational vehicle through the Baltic States, on their first visit to Estonia and Saare

<sup>3</sup> Saare County is the westernmost county of Estonia and consists of five larger islands and numerous islets. Saaremaa is the biggest island and Saare County often gets associated with it. Muhu is the second largest island. Saaremaa and Muhu are connected by causeway, and a ferry connection runs between Muhu and mainland Estonia.

<sup>4</sup> Kati, Tiina, Neeme, Seija and Matti, Riikka and Juhani, Mart and Sybil, Katrina and Peter, Timo.

<sup>5</sup> Names were changed for anonymity

County. Jon from Canada was visiting his father who settled on island in 1995 from Canada; this was his second visit in ten years. All other interviewees had somewhat longer experience with the island. The Finnish couple, Seija and Matti, had owned their second home on island since 2003. Another couple from Finland, Riikka and Juhani, had bought an old farmstead in Kaarma parish, Saaremaa, as their summer home three years prior. In 2000, a farmhouse in Pöide village became a summer home for Timo from Finland after his marriage to a local girl. Sybil and Mart from Belgium have been in their Kuressaare house (Mart’s birthplace) for more than 10 years after the place was returned to them during the restitution process<sup>6</sup> in 1993. Restitution also brought Katrina from Sweden back to Vilsandi Island, her birthplace, and now she shares her “escape-land” together with her Swedish husband Peter. A man from the Netherlands, Rene, discovered the island via friends and became a frequent visitor. An Estonian woman, Tiina, has her childhood home in Kuressaare as a second home. The same applies to a young Estonian man, Neeme from Leisi parish. Kati was born on island and has a second home in Kuressaare which she acquired because of her business.

The interviewees chose the place of interview; most preferred their second home, with one done in a restaurant, two in their roadhouse, and two in their hosts’ home. Choice of interview location was important, indicating a willingness to share their place with support from familiar surroundings in the conversation, pointing to an object to illustrate the visual or other sensual rhetoric of the place itself. All of the second homes except one were private houses or farmsteads, mostly located in the countryside. The interviews, conducted in English, Estonian, Finnish, and German, were transcribed and coded in the original language. Emergent themes of place experiences were coded via verbal expressions and as well as the emotional behavior witnessed. The emotional dynamics of rhetorical conversation between interviewees, researcher, and place became the subject of reflection and analysis.

### Findings: Experiences of elsewhere

Discourse from sixteen in-depth interviews is coupled with a theoretical discussion exploring place, emotions, memory, and self through an analysis of personal narratives on individual emotional perspectives of meaningful places, memory of places elsewhere, and the materiality of the cultural landscape itself. Emotional aspects associated with verbal expressions are examined with a discussion of emergent themes of place experience via a literary narrative writing approach (Burlingame, 2019). Findings were divided into five thematic sections to represent the empirical categories found: places desired, places remembered, lost and found, elsewhere-ness and home, and returns.

#### *Places desired*

Islands have been (desired) *escapescapes* throughout time, often due to curiosity and identity search. Peron (2004) argues that it is not a passing fad, but continues today as an inherent search for a *fateful moment*, especially for those from developed countries. “Fateful moments” (Giddens, 1991) lured many interviewees to the island. Riikka and Juhani were visiting the island just after they sold their holiday home in the Finnish

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<sup>6</sup> A restitution process, which took place after Estonia gained its second independence after the collapse of Soviet Union, re-established the property rights prior to the nationalisation in 1940.

archipelago. Riikka described the ferry crossing to the island on a beautiful summer day as ‘emotional’, creating a powerful need to return:

*We came by ferry, and it was so exotic! Wow! We loved this place immediately, the nature and the overall atmosphere this place has.*

For Riikka and Juhani, this place filled a void left after losing their second home in the archipelago for more than 20 years. Riikka felt a sense of fatefulness:

*It’s quite often that people are guided to a certain place. It’s important to accept this guidance, and not resist it.*

Riikka and Juhani made an offer to buy on an old farmhouse within one night of visiting the island. As Riikka said, “I see things through the eyes of the soul [laughing].”

Seija and Matti’s – the other interviewees from Finland – fateful island encounter began during their winter 2003 visit. Although Saaremaa is predominantly considered a summer escapeland, the fairytale-like wintery setting, created an emotional recognition of this place as *their place* (Grydehøj & Casagrande, 2020). Similar to Riikka and Juhani, Seija and Matti had just sold their Finnish home prior to their first visit to the island, although their travel plans were made long before they chose to sell. The lure of an island winter wonderland changed their original plan to move to Spain, “and we never regretted it,” said Juhani.

While on a roadtrip through the Baltic States, Gertrud and Manfred, via an encounter with a stranger in Latvia, got advice to come to Saaremaa. With prior plans to come anyhow, they were left with heightened curiosity about one of Estonia’s most desired vacation spots. Curiosity was also the word Rene from the Netherlands used about his desire to come, yet more related to a special island feel, “this draw to the island,” that also makes him a frequent visitor to the islands in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe.

Katrina’s fateful island encounter stretches back in time. Just after she was born, her family left the island as refugees. Although the dream of a free Estonia was carried in the hearts of people, the collapse of the Soviet Union was rapid and somewhat unexpected. After 50 years, Katrina’s mother was able to return just once before she died. No-one else in the family except Katrina was interested in this small property “far away somewhere”; Katrina followed her mothers’ dream. “For me this was only a dream, something intangible,” Mart said, describing the importance of this place to him. After fleeing the island in 1944, when he was just two years old, he said, “I heard stories about Estonia from my Mom. She missed it very much.” His long story of escape recollected through his mother’s memories, and a re-discovery of the place for himself in 1989, when it was still under Soviet occupation, had an emotional effect; “The very first time after the war. And when I saw the towers of Tallinn from the sea, it was [pause] ‘wow’.”<sup>7</sup>

“It was fate, even this fate was related to the fact that I was born here,” stated Kati as she explained her decision for a second home as a mix of obligation and pleasure. Even she admits the important element of freedom in desire: “I have my second home here not because I lack something in Tallinn, it’s a question of balance and still far away from ideal.” She feels freer in her little house, built herself just a block from her childhood place, than if

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<sup>7</sup> Tallinn, the capital city of Estonia, is known for its walled old town and distinctive heritage buildings.



she would have inherited a place from her ancestors, that would have been “somebody’s else vision and desire.”

Neeme portrays the important attributes his place offers:

*Silence and solitude [pause]. I think this is it, the important one. Part of mine, our [Estonians] identity [pause]. But, how much is there really a silence? It really isn’t silence though. Open your ears and everything buzzes around you, like here and now [pause and we listen together to the sounds of nature]. And this everyday work here [pause], one part of that solitude is that you can chop the wood. [laughing]*

Neeme stresses the traditional spatial layout as part of his identity with the place, as an important aspect of his Estonian identity. He doesn’t like the recent trend to build houses near each other on open fields: “This is alien to us. We like to be separated by patches of forests and big gardens around us.” For Tiina, her big garden (Figure 6) and friendly neighbours “in the distance,” as she adds, are essential to her feelings of home, her perfect *escapeland*, a place “where to do whatever desired.” One of the main lures of the island place for Tiina is the “feeling of being at home in Estonia,” a “place without *Others*.”<sup>8</sup>



Figure 6 – Countryside home with a big garden (authors’ photo, 2010).

Silence, solitude, and peacefulness were stressed by everyone as qualities the place has to offer, and which are desired because it is absent or unnoticed in their everyday lives.

*How would I describe this place? First of all, a peacefulness. I feel so relaxed immediately when already on a ferry. And this wind here and light ... maybe the locals don’t even notice it, but this light is something special. (Timo)*

Memories of other meaningful places are constantly present even if not consciously acknowledged; “We live fixations, fixations of happiness” (Bachelard, 1994, p. 6). As

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Others’, i.e., the Russian-speaking population. Tiina lives permanently in Tallinn, where native Estonians comprise less than half of the population. This situation is largely due to the era of Soviet occupation when ethnic republics were forcefully re-populated by Russians to insure a “homogeneous Soviet population.”

Bachelard (1994, p. 6) describes, “the places in which we have experienced daydreaming reconstitute themselves in a new ... because our memories of former dwelling-places are relived as daydreams, that these dwelling-places of the past remain in us for all time.”

### *Places remembered*

*At times we think we know ourselves in time, when all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being's stability. (Bachelard, 1994, p. 8)*

Memories combine both true and false elements into a single re-collection. Those places that capture times past are often imbued with nostalgic renderings and may contain several moments of melancholy. Childhood memories represent times lived without nostalgia (Boym, 2001). Yet, Freud (1962) implies that almost all childhood memories are probable constructions, ‘screens’, with hidden meaning. Places are sensed and remembered in accordance to bodily limitations and liberations over the lifespan. Childhood memories gain genesis through the bodily space of a child. In a process of remembering childhood places, memories are overwritten by newly expanded experiences, while adding and creating a new and deeper layer of meanings. Interviewees’ memories of childhood, as reflected upon the island places, were analyzed along those lines of reasoning.

*First time when I was here in 1994, it was like being transferred back in time. When I was a little girl I visited my grandparents and their farm was the same. This out house, and everything ... Yes, I was like back in my childhood. But this place has evolved for me since that first encounter. (Sybil)*

Memory is cultural, and childhood memories of place can gain their own temporal extension to other childhood places when portrayed by meaningful people, thus expanding their power. Katrina from Sweden, who rebuilt her family home on Vilsandi, states:

*I was born here, but we left when I was 8 months old ... My own memories of this place are nothing. My Mom has told me things. I asked her to write down her memories for me, and she did a little. I just recently read her memories again of her childhood. She had a nice childhood here. But [pause] myself, I grew up in Sweden.*

When asked if the first encounter with this place was very different from her mothers’ memories, Katrina replied that it was not the same at all. She added, “But we have changed it.” “According to her memories?” I asked. “No, by our own desires,” was her response.

The interviewees often referred to their childhood memories; and they were not always happy ones when reflecting on their meaningful places. Childhood memories must coexist peacefully with later memories to enable us to remember the place.

*What I remember from my childhood? I lived nearby, just a street over from my house here. I pass by my childhood home, and [pause] I do not seem to have any memories. That place does not move me emotionally. (Kati)*

Katrina’s and Kati’s memories of childhood places cannot be described as nostalgic. But nostalgia is not just trapped in the past with mourning for pastime. Nostalgia is also reflective (Boym, 2001). Reflective nostalgia does not refer to “symbols, just details,” and “explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones”

(Boym, 2001, p. xviii). Reflective nostalgia is also not taken too seriously, and calls for doubt, enabling new beginnings (Boym, 2001). Or, as Bachelard states, “Childhood remains within us a principle of deep life, of life always in harmony with the possibilities of new beginnings” (1994, p. 124). Knopp (2002) refers to “everyplacetime” which is not just remembering, nor nostalgia, but just beginning. We carry it within us to other places, contributing to the heterotopias (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986). These are contested territories – walking the same territories but moving in very different mental landscapes (Elands & Lengkeek, 2012; Löfgren, 1999).

*Life is here like [long pause] yes, we live in the present, but sometimes there is a feeling that we live in the past – back in 1977. This return in time [pause], yes, nostalgia is a very good word for that. (Timo)*

Timo refers to buildings and old domestic tools, which he finds fascinating, and primarily to social customs, which are replaced in most other places he has lived by more modern ones, “People stop by much more often here, without prior arrangements nor pre-planning. Just to chat. Like it used to be in Finland years ago.”

Nostalgic feelings are constantly mentioned, sensually and rationally, as described by the interviewees:

*From the very beginning we purchased this place, we felt a certain return to childhood, I would say a fifties feeling. I remember once coming here and I saw a man pushing a carriage with a milk container. I said to my husband, look how nostalgic! But I realised at the same moment how hard must it be for that old man. I had very controversial feelings. (Riikka) This is not very nostalgic for those people here. (Juhani) Yes, I thought, how can I be so selfish, time must go forward and life for people get easier. (Riikka)*

The interviewees on the island for the first time often referred to sensual feelings evoked by the environment, such as smells remembered from a childhood – yet, they sought something else to remember:

*We recognise things from our childhood, but this is not what we are looking for. We are looking for something different. This why you leave home. To bring back new ideas, and... Sometimes we bring back small items for our garden. To add something to it. (Gertrud) And to remember. (Manfred)*

Kati denied her emotional connection with her childhood home and places she used to be part of. “This is not my home anymore,” she declared, and added that maybe she never lived in a place long enough. Yet, in her description of island-places she likes to show her summer home guests, she illustrates the painful loss of meaning she encounters in changed places:

*If I visit a sightseeing place after a long time, and something touristy has been added, I don't go back ... For me those places come with different memories. And now they are ordinary tourism objects, just like anywhere else.*

Places known from our childhood change gradually as per our bodily perceptions, as well as from everyday activities, yet in calling from time to time for reflections the question

remains as to ‘what reference points we want change?’ Veijola (2006, p. 80) posed the question as follows:

*How do you know and experience a place you knew as a child; and how does that place know you? At which point do strangers turn into friends, tourists into neighbors, locals into visitors and places into tourist destinations? Can “Heimat” be revisited?*

Neeme acknowledged changes of his childhood place:

*Yes, this place is slowly changing. If you change it yourself, you somehow don’t recognise that some things are disappearing, and something new will replace it. It changes it more and more to the direction you want to. But I don’t want things to change too much. It’s important that this place remains as it is. The more you change it, the more alien it will be.*

Neeme thought that the openness of the place to the outside world works both ways; some locals change the place more than newcomers. He spoke about the modern changes many locals made to their homes referred to merely as “sleeping places.” Conversations with the interviewees alluded to the delicate balance between new and old, over-crowdedness, commercialisation, and issues of a planned bridge to the mainland. Seija, Matti, and Tiina looked forward to the bridge connection. “I want it to be here quickly, I cannot lose my time in ferry lines” was Tiina’s main argument. “It’s about modern times,” voiced Seija and Matti, although the ferry connection was fine for them. Kati didn’t think the bridge would change anything, since too many people come anyway, and an improved ferry connection will just bring more people. The other interviewees, however, viewed the bridge negatively as an accelerator of *change*, something happening *everywhere*:

*I would like it to stay as it is, but I don’t know if it’s possible. I don’t know if we are going to get a bridge or not, but maybe we should not. The longer it stays as is, the better. (Rene)*

Rene’s positive experience with the island made him compare it to other island experiences elsewhere in Europe, where bridges changed the essence of the island experience for him; those places which are ‘lost’. For most interviewees, travel itself to an island was an important part of their experience, something to make a place memorable; as Jon stated, “This is like [pause] a ritual. That you go somewhere, and then you are here, and then you go there.” Rene refers to negative aspects of a bridge:

*You go by ferry, thus constantly reminded you’re on an island ... With a bridge the experience loses some of the romantic or nostalgic feelings about the island. For those on holiday, it’s important to get away from their work. Now I am on the island, now I am at peace ... They throw their sorrows overboard while on the ferry. This is a main reason why we don’t build bridges to the five islands in the Netherlands. It attracts thousands of tourists every year. This is one of those attractive aspects of an island.*

Kati reflects on the virtue of an island:

*Why people come here? I think because it’s an island ... Maybe because time “floats” by here differently, that it’s more peaceful here. It’s a long way to*

*come here and once here, people “switch themselves out” ... they come here to rest.*

Many respondents felt the place would probably continue to attract people with or without a bridge, although the bridge might bring more because of convenience. Yet, as Timo implied, he preferred visitors who come by ferry. For those people, an island without a bridge holds a different meaning. Manfred, an engineer, was very skeptical about the bridge:

*Bridge? I think it might bring more people for a shorter time. They come and look around and go back. I think it will make it easier to come here and [pause] to go. But it is the nature of the island to be alone. But there are so many bridges all over the world ... Again, I have mixed feelings about it. I think it will make it easier [pause] for transportation. But it is no longer an authentic island then.*

### *Lost and found*

A trip in the summer, as an escape to elsewhere, can reconnect and enhance our relationships with the environment. Even the smallest spatial relocation of our everyday practice provides another dimension to temporal and spatial distances. Moving to the summer cottage, or even a structure (i.e., cabana) in the backyard fulfills the role of the ritualistic passage required for a transformation from winter to summer (Löfgren, 1999). Löfgren (1999, p. 153) emphasises the role of that movement – not as much as geographical location as to “a different social space of ‘elsewhereness.’” In this very movement, individual experiences intensify while sensuality increases (Löfgren, 1999). In the different social space of elsewhereness, people willingly expose themselves; overcome prejudice; risk opening the door and perceive the *other side* of the *habitual* (Grydehøj & Casagrande, 2020) through what is preceived lost and latter found again.

Landscapes of a Soviet past became an object of curiosity after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Yet, this exploration of elsewhereness was not perceived by all of the interviewees as a *true* holiday. Gertrud and Manfred called the landscapes they traversed “imbued with sorrow” (Figure 7):

*All these decaying houses and very, very poor people. I am going through those places being on holiday with my big RV, and I find it [pause] sometimes very difficult ... I think you should be well informed and not expect to find just a holiday atmosphere everywhere. (Gertrud)*

Did Gertrud and Manfred find German influence in this place, so heavily promoted for a German tourist market?

*We were surprised to find such a strong influence here, to look and read about it. But it’s hard to determine what it means to the present. Myself, I don’t have roots here, at least I don’t think so, but you never know [pause]. It’s interesting to read about it, I know many Germans find out about their roots now. I read in*

*the Palmse<sup>9</sup> guestbook about one guest who wrote next time he comes he wants to have apple cake like his grandmother used to make. Thus, I think people find their roots here. And they go to the court to get their properties back via restitution. I told my husband, that I can understand them now; I can understand their feelings. But I am still all against that. You cannot change history. (Gertrud)*



Figure 7 – Run-down house in Mustjala (Authors’ photo 2010).

The non-Estonian interviewees mentioned the Soviet past of the place. This place was lost for them with the Soviet occupation, and its remembrance still lingers. Yet for most, the place was open again. Mart rediscovered his roots, “And finally I got my roots back ... I couldn’t believe Estonia was free again in 1991. It was unreal. And then [pause] I came to Saaremaa for the first time.”

The island, as a closed border zone, was kept out of Jon’s reach as well, whose grandfather lived on the island. He was never able to visit him at his home during Soviet times, and just six years ago he made his first trip to see his father and visit his grandfather’s grave. The place was revealed to him through his father’s eyes, and he was happy to see the place this way, and to avoid “all those boring places,” as he said, referring to the touristic places.

The bodily comfort found in the materiality of lived places overwrites the uneasiness of perceived ideological places. Locations on a map become meaningful places through experiences (de Certeau, 1984; Olwig, 2006). Jon spoke of his first encounters with the people and places on the island as an unexpected yet pleasant balance between openness and the discrete. He spoke of a swing he found behind of one of the main buildings built by local villagers where he and his daughters took a break from the “overwhelming facts of historical sites” as a tourist. He spoke fondly of an old man from the neighbourhood who welcomed them with “an open heart” despite the language barriers. “This man is not with us this time [pause] and I missed those little moments,” he said about his current trip. Jon was worried that overdevelopment would deter opportunities for meaningful encounters between locals and visitors.

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<sup>9</sup> Guest manor in Northern Estonia.



For Mart, re-discovery of his roots gave him back his friends and neighbours. Mart, emotionally, explained how sharing with the neighbour (Miko) the same fence they designed together, and a tree from their childhood games with his brothers, and a well (Mart, Sybil, and I tasted the water from it) gave him a feeling of true friendship, making the place more meaningful. “It is so sad Miko is not with us today [pause], but I know he’s watching,” Mart said with a shaky voice. Miko had died two months prior to the interview.

An older Swedish man, Peter, depicted his connection to his summer place through intense feelings of change in nature around him, the sounds and feelings of place not found in Sweden: “When you come here in spring and stay until autumn you see and feel things you can’t in Sweden. Maybe in some places there, [pause] but this place here is perfect.” He wondered why his kids didn’t want to visit his place and wander around the world instead; yet he admits to his own prejudgments:

*I don’t understand why they don’t come here ... but I was the same ... before I came here, when I heard about Estonia, I said no, no, I don’t want to go there. But now [pause] I think whatever they [his kids] look for in other places they can find here too. . . Why do people not like it here [silence], you had war here, and Russians ... I think that was in my mind too, but not now, not anymore.*

Katrina adds:

*Just like my sister. She was very reluctant to come. But once she came, she likes this place, and her family ... Her son asked me that, even he has his own summer house in Sweden, if he can come here more often. [Katrina starts laughing]*

Katrina compared the post-Soviet landscapes to her landscapes back in Sweden:

*When we came years ago everything was un-orderly here. Forests were full of trash, and empty bottles. But we are used to an order. [pause] In Russian time there was a completely different culture and life. Things are different now [pause], but you can still see it in some places [long silence] with old people [long silence], but [long silence] nothing to do.*

Gertrud and Manfred were shocked by the “greyness” of the rural landscape they drove through when on their trip, and with its contrasts. They had a difficult time defining the identity of this place:

*We see contrasts; decay and decaying areas and very modern ones... So different from Finland where there are similar buildings everywhere. What I can define, these communities here are very closed communities; it’s hard to define their feelings. Very serious faces, it is very hard to tell if you are welcomed or not. [pause] But when you get to know them, they are very, very friendly. (Gertrud)*

They described how things gradually got better (for their experience) as the weather improved and they reached the island. “On the mainland things and people are more in transit. Here, it’s more about its’ residents and those people who come to visit and experience,” said Gertrud. Manfred added with mixed feelings his remembrance of pastimes:

*If I compare people, it's hard to say if they are happier or less happy (compared to Germany) ... When I look at people here who work in their little gardens, growing flowers, potatoes, and vegetables, they seem to do it with some sort of internal satisfaction. I was born in 1940, and my mom had three kids, and we also grew vegetables in our garden.*

All of the foreign interviewees voiced similar opinions about ‘closedness’ of the local people on initial contact. The Finns thought it easily explained because of the Soviet past, yet they learned to appreciate warm welcomes when finally accepted by some locals. It added another layer to their experience, to the identity of the place they found amusing. Rene, a Dutchman said:

*I don't have anything to say about people friendliness. People in Eastern European countries and here are always a little [pause, he doesn't finish his sentence]. You have to know them. People have had a very hard time over the past hundred years. You have to understand them.*

Manfred and Gertrud expressed their feelings of security when traveling through places with easily readable identity. They voiced their willingness to return to Finland, Sweden, and England to traverse “authentic” rural landscapes, as Gertrud referred to: “I think we look for authenticity. It must be an authentic place.” And she added, “those are things that make you feel safe, relaxed.” Paralleling authenticity with clearly defined identity gave Manfred and Gertrud a sense of happiness with their home:

*I think we are lucky, because the place we live still has the things that remind us of our childhood. It has changed through development, but like houses, people change them back to the original. They now try to conserve things. To us those changes are not so noticeable. There is not such a need to find something...*  
(Gertrud)

Estonian respondents evaluated the Soviet past from different angles. Tiina found remnants of collective farm buildings and former military establishments “painful to see,” and something that should be “eliminated” from the landscape. Kati referred to the curiosity and desire this place evoked from the past as a closed border zone. She acknowledged there still might be some negative connotation for domestic tourists. The comfort and safety of this place as described by Tiina – the “homeland Estonia without ‘Others’” – was largely influenced by this past closedness, too, although she never made that reference.

### *Elsewhereness and home*

Places are empowered through bodily experience, yet the inherent features of place itself, the aspects of a place’s ‘atmosphere’ contribute to its evocativeness, expressiveness and character (Casey, 2001; Hong, 2020; Proust, 1954; Urry, 2006); “These ghostly presences of place are in between subject and object, presence and absence” (Urry, 2006, p. viii).

Bittersweet memories of desires evolve through sensual rhetoric’s of bodily sensations. The most hidden memories are often revealed by smells in their ability to evoke the past from that special locus between experience and representation (Le Guerier, 2002; Proust, 1954). Sheltered from intellectual analysis, they work as tools of emotional knowledge and

become reflected in everyday language. They give us feelings of “security, pleasure and well-being, they make us feel at home” (Köster, 2002, p. 27). The Proustian remembrance of place is hauntingly present even when we seek new experiences in new places.

*I sense places through my nose. When I am by the sea, then I feel places from my childhood. I don't remember anything from the place I was born. I only lived there 4 years. But 11 years of my life I lived by Elbe. When I plan my travels, I try to find places where to experience something new, but in all places I will feel the association with my childhood. Like here, the smell of sea... [our conversation was by the sea, in the RV campground] I have memory pictures when I was a little boy by Elbe. And also the smell of linden trees and birch trees here. (Manfred)*

Smells in their resistance to abstraction capture that indefinable “something that emanates from a person, a place, a situation” (Le Guerier, 2002, p. 11). Bachelard (1994, p. 9) states “memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are.” Connectedness to place comes through time and tuned sensitivity. Sometimes it requires us to distance ourselves from the place to understand its meaning:

*This is this perception, and it often reveals itself when you lose it for some reason. With moving to Tallinn, after some years, while sitting here on a summer evening, I realised what I actually lost. That grass can smell, and grasshoppers sing. Before I didn't realise it, it was somehow as a background. (Neeme)*

Due to this enhanced sensuality, those places are more present in everyday than acknowledged. Those places are present in daydreams between vacations if not bodily inhabited (Bachelard, 1994; Löfgren, 1999). Those places are seemingly motionless, capturing time; the past is constantly part of the present here. Summer places are for many a territory for rooting and, emotionally, holiday places are often placed first among other places (Löfgren, 1999).

Timeframes for reflection are caught by places, as material witnesses of a “longue durée” layer of history (Braudel, 1980). History of place was strongly emphasised by the interviewees, and for many it was the lure of the place, if not the most important part of their conscious and sub-conscious search for identity and belonging. Both material and social traces of place were important to the interviewees. The Finnish couple described their place through their feelings towards the thick cultural layers it embedded:

*One thing is important here, this is an old place. People from those past times knew how to establish a place, those buildings here have the right energy. People lived here, and made their living here for themselves and their families. The fact that all was here before us, this base to go from. I don't believe I would have the same feeling, if I would have purchased a lot on the seaside amongst those sturdy junipers and built a luxury vacation home there. This is not the same feeling at all. Yes, this is what we feel here, and this makes it home also for us. (Riikka)*

The emotional stories of the evolution of their second home added an understanding of what makes them feel at home, in addition to their personal contribution to their farmstead. This energy of home, the substance over image, escapes the uncanny

postmodern nostalgia (Vidler, 1992). Similar feelings were described by the other Finnish interviewees as well. They referred to the ease of getting settled as a combination of similarities and differences, which allowed them to better understand how culturally connected they were.

Two of the Estonian respondents inherited their second homes which were also their childhood homes, and for them memories of place were connected to the ‘trust’ in the place, to make the place feel like home.

*This is my birthplace. It means that is my home. Some other places like this? Some places may become almost like this if you don't have a place to compare too. But if you have your childhood home, which has been loved, then... (Tiina)*

Neeme expressed similar feelings:

*What does this place mean for me? It means everything. This is my home. Not just a big island. I have everything here what I am, what I need. My roots. There is no home in Tallinn. That is some other kind of concept. A place you go to sleep and leave to go to work. Home does not evolve from four walls. It is more than that. Something extra. For me this a place where my ancestors are from. A place you come, and everybody from village knows you and your parents. And for many generations behind. It is this feeling you can't put into words ... It comes from somewhere deep inside. You put your feet on the ground, and you know, this is a place I belong to.*

Meanings of homeplace are closely linked to belonging, habitually discussed in relation to roots, leading to a troublesome national identity. National identity, often connected to restorative nostalgia, this trial to pair longing with belonging where re-discovery of identity can dangerously put an end to mutual understanding, can confuse the actual home with an imaginary one (Boym, 2001). Yet such feelings don't have to be so restrictive. As Game (2001, p. 226) says, “belonging, is an experience of living in-between” – and in this in-betweenness evolves reflective nostalgia allowing many flavors of different places and times (Boym, 2001), as reflected in the following quotes:

*Our roots? This is not so important I think ... We do not have any countryside roots ... Where is your heart, there is your home. We have our heart in two places, here, and in Finland. There are two chambers in your heart [laughing] and we have two homes too, and I do not know which one is more important. (Riikka)*

*It's difficult for us to name those most important places in our lives. We have moved ten times. And home is where you build it next time [pause] and they change, and they are behind then, and you do not regret or miss them ... Has this place become part of our identity? Yes, we are islanders and we want to be islanders [Matti says the last sentence in Estonian and laughs happily]. (Matti)*

*What makes a place home? First of all people [a long pause], and some personal things to do. Roots are important, but a person can get rooted somewhere else too. I think Saaremaa for me is more important than the place I was born, and where all my childhood friends are ... Saaremaa offers me*

*everything I want to do in life. And I think I want to come here more than my wife does [his wife was born on island]. (Timo)*

Timo shared a long conversation about his place on the island. Answering the question about lost places, Timo admitted to a deep emotional connection he had with his grandfather in his childhood place. “That place is sold now, it is a lost place,” but adds that this place on island compensates for all those other places. Timo surprised with his almost flawless Estonian. He stressed the importance of appreciation of language and culture of places he deemed meaningful to him.

The conversation with Jon adds yet another aspect to place and the language connection. Jon mentioned how hearing the Estonian language in everyday conversations gave him an “odd and powerful feeling” – “When I come to Estonia, I feel that I have a place here, yet simultaneously I feel I don’t. It’s a weird thing I can’t explain.” Born in an Estonian-Canadian family, living his entire life in Toronto, he had a hard time identifying himself. “I want to think about myself as an Estonian,” he admits, but confesses his desire being somewhat “sadly playful,” “as a hobby” for him, as a meaning of belongingness that becomes merely “abstract,” when not “lived through every day.”

### Returns

Vacations are about nostalgia of return (Löfgren, 1999). “Every time I come here I feel better [pause] inside” (Peter).

Dreams of vacation are not linear in time, as memories become reflected in future dreams. Gertrud and Manfred, the only first-time visitors, didn’t find a desired *holiday land*:

*Is it really the place I would like to go back to? [pause] Maybe in many, many years to come to see the changes. There is a very beautiful nature here, but [pause] I don’t know if I would do the same trip again, going so far to the east ... because I found it very depressing. But that is what I wanted to see? [pause] I would only recommend it to the people who are very curious, you must be prepared to find things to be different ... So you must be very open. (Gertrud)*

Describing her usual holiday places, Gertrud said, “We spend holidays in Europe, never outside.” Sybil from Belgium, however, portrayed a place as not far to the east but as “far west,” as a rest point from the “overcrowded system,” as she calls it, with “this space, all this space we Belgians like.” Rene likes the place because of the space, too:

*In the future I will also come, definitely, and maybe with my family. To convince them maybe? We have always liked places, which are not touristy. This is not a touristy place, it is touristy, but not like this massive touristy place. This I think is a major thing for my family that is not massive touristy, that we can relax here.*

Many interviewees indicated that a return was in their minds immediately upon reaching the place:

*Our hearts are here, and when back in Finland, we think of our return. When we leave, we already start thinking about when we can go back. I can’t explain what it is. [pause] It’s just that feeling what is so good. (Riikka)*

Yet, Katrina referred to limitations for returning: “If my kids lose interest in this place, then [a long pause], then there’s nothing to do, but [pause] sell.” She admits that she can’t accept the place run-down, and that they would soon be too old to keep it because of all the work.

Since many respondents had second homes on an island, their experience of the place has yet another spatial and temporal dimension. As Löfgren states (1999), second homes instill a temporal and spatial return, an illusion of captured time and space since the next vacation continues from the past where the last experience left off.

## Discussion

Two categories of experiencing space and time – space of experience and horizons of expectation – exist. “Experience is present past, whose events have been incorporated and could be remembered ... while expectation is the future made present; it directs itself to the not-yet, to the non-experienced, to that which is to be revealed” (Koselleck, 1985, p. 272). Modern nostalgia longs for a “shrinking space of experience’, that no longer fits the new horizon of expectations” (Boym, 2001, p. 10). Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship where this cinematic image works as a superimposition of two images – of home and out-there, past and present, dream and everyday life – and cannot be reduced to a single moment. Thus, a nostalgic is never a native (Boym, 2001), but a displaced person mediating between local and universal, gaining perspectives from the journey, gazing backwards and sideways.

Contemporary research of identities in a mobile world treats identity as a search (Young, 1997); “But sometimes movement is not about a search for, but an escape from, identity, or an escape from the dissonance between where one is and where one would like to be, but without any specific destination” (Rapport & Dawson, 1998, p. 52). Home is an ambiguous concept and numerous studies have questioned the narrow views of home as exclusionary, totalising and an emblem of regressive nostalgia (Boym, 2001; Raadik Cottrell, 2010, 2017; Young, 1997); “Home as the materialisation of identity does not fix identity but anchors it in physical being that makes a continuity between past and present” (Young 1997, p. 159). Serving as a link between past, present, and future, it allows us to revisit and reassess the past and rewrite our stories to view future change. Young (1997, p. 151) argues that without such an anchoring “we are, literally lost.” Interviewees expressed the meaningfulness of the island place (or places elsewhere) through the notion of home, however without denial of change as part of it. Many found the openness of themselves an important aspect of their place experience, along with the qualities of the place, which enable those opportunities.

Opportunities in experiences were expressed in contrasts, often in combination of temporarily and spatially restricted tourist places as open and sensual places (Edensor, 2006), where the latter were perceived still more predominant and important to ensure the desired experience. The interviewees voiced those opinions in relation to the development occurring on island, yet where the present still holds intriguing opportunities like a crossroads. The sensuality of the place noted resembles a certain delicate balance the place has maintained between a “marked” tourist place and the “old way of life” (Edensor, 2006) of its community. As one of the interviewees commented:



*I must invent or find out a new word how to describe it. If you say it is cute or quaint, then maybe it would describe the place as it tries to replicate the old way of living, this modern attempt to live the way it used to be, but here people truly live it. It is original, peculiar, friendly, and very historical too in its' way. To see this place [pause], some things are easy to see, some things you must find out. (Jon)*

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the place experience in more depth than from surveys, to examine the assumed connection between memory and perceived place identity through experienced landscapes as tourists. Saare County was an ideal case to investigate the power of the past over the present and future. Memories of island place and places elsewhere, linked identities, places and landscapes perceived and remembered. Home, everyday, and elsewhere form intertwined impressions of island places memorised; balanced on the line of expressions of belonging, as quality experiences of everyday and nostalgic renderings of times and places lost. Tourism as a modern exile draws heavily on a feeling of nostalgia. Thus, it is not surprising that experiences of an island place among the survey respondents and our interviewees were often voiced as nostalgic, even with quite different or mixed feelings, and dispersed points in time. This is not surprising either, as the past has become much more unpredictable than the future. The Soviet past of the place was strongly present in interviewee emotional readings of landscapes visited and dwelled. Memories from the ideological images of place as well as memories of places elsewhere were intertwined into bodily perceptions of place yet resulted in somewhat contradictory statements. Those individual and collective memories intertwined resulted in multiple layers of emotional readings of identity and vocalised desires of present and future experiences of the place. Evaluation of changes in landscapes align with perceived identities of place and self and reflected upon readings of home. Historical aspects of place were deemed an important part of place experience. Different layers of meanings related to Saare County's past as an island place included influences from collective memories, autobiographical memories intertwined with collective ones, as well as from representations of the place used by the tourism industry. Place identity and personal identity were evaluated against that screen of past and socio-cultural background of respondents and played an important role in those readings.

Acknowledging that memory is a central medium for identity construction coming from multiple paths available for the future, only those memories which best fit the current context are chosen. There is a need for more comprehensive longitudinal research to identify visitors' place evaluations, perceptions of proposed changes, and expectations for future visits. Future research should include residents to identify possible discrepancies between different stakeholders in relation to future developments with a focus on second homeowners and their sense of place.

### Note - Reflexivity from the researcher

The importance of reflexivity in research is acknowledged, yet the emotional aspects of reflexivity in research have been neglected, with some exceptions (Varley, 2008). As a researcher of my own childhood place, I was aware that

my own emotions would inevitably be part of this study, thereby justifying the need to write in a literary style. Many places on the island, meaningful to me in the past, have changed. Many people who made the place what it is to me have left. I understood many levels of the emotional comments of my interviewees, and those smells, tastes, and sounds of the place are important to me as well. I was more sensitive to those aspects in our conversations, thus probably deemed it more important to reflect upon. I understand the limitations as well as advantages of this study due to my complex insider-outsider position (born in Estonia, raised on Saaremaa, and living part time in the USA). Quite a lot remained unsaid; I felt many often gave up on the idea of trying to explain everything meaningful in the place. Being a researcher of my island place, I feel the place is more about me than I would like to acknowledge, and less than I would dare to dream – Jana Raadik Cottrell.

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